

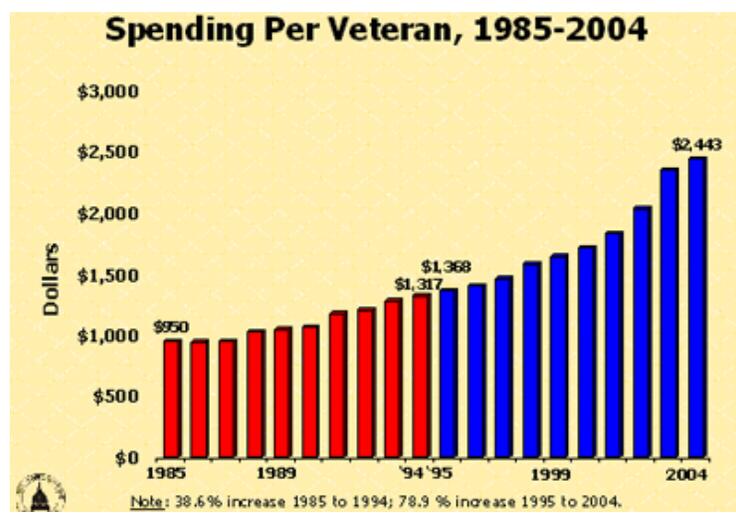
# Congressional Update for Veterans Summer, 2004

## Veterans Budget Continues 10 Year Funding Increases

The Veterans Budget for the 2005 fiscal year is \$70.8 billion dollars, a boost of **15.3%** from 2004. This rise in funding is another in a series of budget increases over the last ten years. In fact, since 1995:

- \* Total budget authority has increased by 58%.
- \* Spending for veterans medical care has increased 75%, from \$16.2 billion to \$28.3 billion.
- \* The number of veterans receiving care increased from 2.5 million to 4.7 million, an 88% increase.
- \* Monthly education benefit levels under the Montgomery GI Bill more than doubled from \$405 to \$985.
- \* Total per-veteran spending increased from \$1,368 to \$2,443, a 79% increase.

These historic increases in funding have given more access to veterans to vital health care services. In the FY 2005 veterans budget, over \$31 billion is available in discretionary spending, the majority of which will be spent on health care services.

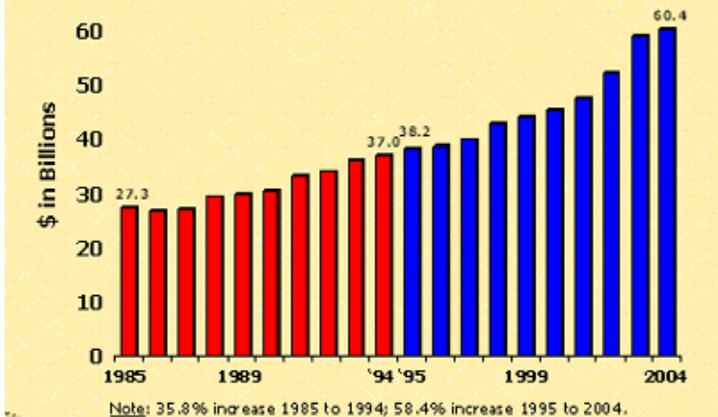


Source: Office of Management and Budget

### Recently Passed Veterans Legislation

Several pieces of legislation have recently been signed into law by President Bush. The **Veterans Benefits Act of 2003**, signed into law December 16, 2003, expands and improves certain readjustment benefits for disabled veterans as well as surviving spouses and children. The **Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003**, signed into law December 6, 2003, improves and enhances health care provisions for veterans and authorizes major construction projects for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The **Service Members Civil Relief Act**, signed into law December 19, 2003, strengthens the rights and protections afforded military personnel called to active duty, including an automatic 90-day stay for civil proceedings, protections against evictions due to nonpayment of rent, and a limitation on interest not

### Budget Authority for Veterans Programs Before and After 1995



Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

to exceed 6 percent on outstanding loan balances. The **Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003**, signed into law December 3, 2003, provides cost-of-living (COLA) increases for disability payments for veterans.

Bills that have passed the House of Representatives and await Senate action include the **Selected Reserve Home Loan Equity Act**, H.R. 1257, which would make permanent the authority for qualifying Selected Reserve members to have access to home loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and provide uniformity for the fees charged for the loans. The **Veterans Entrepreneurship and Benefits Improvement Act of 2003**, H.R. 1460, would allow veterans to use VA education benefits to enroll in a non-degree, non-credit entrepreneurship course offered by SBA-funded Small Business Development Centers as well as allow disabled veterans enrolled in school under a vocational rehabilitation program to establish self-employment in a small business enterprise as a vocational goal. The **Veterans Health Care Facilities Capital Improvement Act**, H.R. 1720, would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out construction projects to improve, renovate, establish, and update patient care facilities at VA medical centers. The **Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2003**, H.R. 2357, would establish standards of access to care for veterans seeking health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

These bills and others like them will help ensure that veterans receive reliable health care, excellent education, and reasonable home loans. I will continue to support other legislation honoring and benefiting veterans for their invaluable service.

### Survivor Benefit Plan Passes Armed Services Committee

The House Armed Services Committee approved eliminating the social security offset under the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) by increasing the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 or older. The SBP provision was included in H.R. 4200, the Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization Act, which the committee passed on May 12, 2004. The provision, similar to H.R. 548, will restore payments to surviving spouses over the next 4½ years.

Relative to premiums paid, uniformed services survivor benefits do not match what was promised and provided to survivors of other federal retirees. Restoring equity requires an increase in the SBP annuity. SBP was enacted in 1972, and under the current plan, survivors are faced with a 20% drop in their annuity once they reach age 62. The typical recipient experiences a reduction in his annuity from 55% of the retiree's pay to 35%. Thousands of these survivors were never told about this annuity cut, and the unexpected loss of income is often financially devastating.

I am proud to have cosponsored SBP legislation during my tenure in Congress and I am pleased that this inequity has finally been addressed.

The SBP provision will eliminate the social security offset under SBP and increase the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 or older from 35% of retired pay to the percentages indicated for the following periods:

- (1) For months after September 2005 and before April 2006: 40 percent
- (2) For months after March 2006 and before April 2007: 45 percent
- (3) For months after March 2007 and before April 2008: 50 percent
- (4) For months after March 2008: 55 percent

H.R. 4200 is expected to be considered by the House shortly, and following passage I am hopeful that the Senate will support the SBP provisions so we can send this measure to the President's desk as soon as possible.



## Tampa VAMC to Receive New In-Patient Bed Tower

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released its "Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services" (CARES) report of the veteran's health care system with recommendations for meeting current and future needs.

As outlined in this report, the VA will construct a new medical center in Orlando to meet the growing needs of Central Florida's veterans, a population that is currently underserved. With an increasing number of veterans living and relocating to central Florida, it is important to increase VA medical resources for the area.

In addition, the VA will build an inpatient bed tower at the Tampa VA Medical Center. This center, the James A. Haley VA Medical Center, is a 327 bed tertiary care teaching hospital, with 300 authorized nursing home care beds and is dedicated to providing the highest quality of patient care and services to veterans in Central Florida. While still an active medical center, it is aging and in need of significant upgrades. The addition of a new bed tower at the facility will resolve pressing infrastructure and safety issues. This hospital was activated in 1972 and is affiliated with the University of South Florida College of Medicine. The hospital was renamed after James Andrew Haley in 1978. Congressman Haley, who represented Central Florida, was Chair of the Hospital Subcommittee of the Veterans Affairs Committee, and was directly responsible for the placement of the facility in Tampa.



The James A. Haley VA Medical Center will build a new in-patient bed tower to help provide quality medical care to veterans in Central Florida.

About 451,000 of Florida's 1.8 million veterans were treated last year in VA's health care facilities, up 55% from 290,000 in 2000. In 2003, the VA spent \$4.2 billion in Florida, an increase of 35.5% from the \$3.1 billion level three years before. The VA is also in the process of identifying a site for establishing a new national cemetery in the Sarasota area and will evaluate the feasibility of potential opportunities within the site selection process.

### Congressman Adam H. Putnam

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#### Local Veterans Resources

Hillsborough County Veterans

Service Office: 813-975-2181

Osceola County Veterans Service

Office: 407-932-5150

Polk County Veterans Service

Office: 863-534-5220

St. Petersburg Regional Office:

800-827-1000

Orlando VA Healthcare Center:

800-922-7521

James A. Haley VA Medical

Center: 813-903-4815;  
toll free 888-716-7787

#### National Resources

VA Benefits: 1-800-827-1000

Life Insurance: 1-800-669-8477

GI Bill: 1-888-442-4551

Health Care Benefits:

1-877-222-8387

Headstones and Markers:

1-800-697-6947

TDD: 1-800-829-4833

## National World War II Memorial Opening

The National World War II Memorial is the first national memorial dedicated to all who served during World War II. The memorial, established by the American Battle Monuments Commission and situated prominently on the National Mall, will honor all 116 million who served in the U.S. armed forces, the 400,000 who died, and the millions who supported the war effort from home.



The National World War II Memorial will be dedicated Saturday, May 29, 2004 in Washington, DC.

The memorial will be a monument to the spirit, sacrifice, and commitment of the American people and the values we hold dear as a nation. Commemorating the sacrifices and celebrating the victories of the WWII generation, the memorial will stand as an important symbol of national unity and recognize those who helped ensure freedom and democracy for our country and others around the world.

The National World War II Memorial will be officially dedicated on Saturday, May 29, 2004, Memorial Day Weekend. Congress passed legislation in 1993 authorizing the National World War II Memorial, and after a two-stage, open design competition, Architect Friedrich St. Florian's

design was selected. The 7.4 acre site is located between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. Situated at the Rainbow Pool, 56 erected pillars surrounding the bronze and granite plaza represent the unity of the U.S. states and territories during the war. Visitors will enter the sunken plaza on ramps that will pass by two arches soaring over 40 feet in the air that represent the two fronts of the war. Inside, there will be a Freedom Wall covered with 4,000 gold stars, each representing 100 Americans that died during the war.

After almost sixty years since the end of World War II, I am pleased our country is honoring the countless veterans and citizens who embody the American credo "land of the free and home of the brave."

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

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GOVERNMENT REFORM

Chairman, Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census

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